

News From the Legislature

State Representative **Ross Hunter** 48th Legislative District



Keeping in touch

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- Finance (Vice Chair)
- Appropriations
- Education
- Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (Chair)
- Information Systems Board



2006 Session Report

The 60-day legislative session adjourned one day early and produced significant progress in many key areas. This was due to strong leadership from the Governor and members on both sides of the aisle in the House and Senate working together to achieve results.

Some of the major accomplishments include:

- Providing options for students taking our graduation test (WASL) to ensure fairness and targeted assistance to those students needing extra help;
- Historic, bipartisan compromises on contentious issues such as medical malpractice, unemployment insurance, and Columbia River water use;
- Moving the primary election a month earlier to give our military voters more time to send in their ballots and removing the parking fee at state parks;
- An agreement on a regional transportation plan that moves us in the right direction to getting critical projects such as the 520 floating bridge funded and fixed; and
- Increasing penalties for sex predators and those with multiple DUI convictions.

We also approved a supplemental budget that funds critical items like learning assistance for high school students and leaves more than \$900 million in savings accounts and reserves. We recognize that the surplus, largely from the housing market, is not anticipated to continue. These savings will go toward rising costs in education, health care and pensions we expect next biennium.

Thank you again for the opportunity to represent you in Olympia. I look forward to your comments about what we did this legislative session.



Ross Hunter

State Representative

48th District, D-Medina

Town Hall

April 5, 2006

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Northwest University
Room F-7, Ness Building
5520 108th Ave. NE, Kirkland

Topics: Education,
Transportation
State Budget

Education

Washington's public schools serve more than one million K-12 students, an increase of 100,000 kids since we set out to reform our education system in 1993. We have made tremendous progress since then to raise academic standards and improve achievement in response to the economic and technological changes needed for today's students to compete and succeed in the world.



Getting to Graduation

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning plays a key role in our education reform efforts. The test measures thinking and analytical skills, as well as knowledge learned in various subjects such as reading, writing, math and science. The results give school districts the ability to focus additional learning assistance to help students who do not meet academic standards.

About 84,000 students in the graduating class of 2008 will have taken the 10th grade WASL by the end of April. This is the first class required to pass the test to receive a high school diploma. To get our students to graduation, I devoted many hours this session to address concerns about fairness and to make certain state funding is used effectively to help students pass the test.



Parents will receive their child's WASL scores by June 15. Should their child not pass the test, the first of four retake opportunities will occur in August, and only sections not previously passed need to be retaken. To give all students an opportunity to succeed, we worked on three major components this year:

Learning assistance (HB 2489):

The House passed the bill I sponsored to provide funding for school districts to offer summer school programs, after school tutoring and Saturday class to help students learn the skills necessary to graduate. This bill was ultimately incorporated in the supplemental budget and provides \$28 million for learning assistance.

Alternative assessments (SB 6475):

The Legislature approved this bill to give students four alternative options to show they meet standards if they do not pass the WASL on their second attempt. The goal is to be fair to students who don't do well on standardized tests, but can prove they know the material. The four options approved this session include:

- A comparison of GPA in core classes against students in those classes that passed the WASL. If you do better than the average student that passed, you pass;

- An extensive collection of work samples that shows a student's mastery of skills;
- A similar collection of evidence from very rigorous career and technical education programs; and
- A qualifying score from the PSAT, SAT or ACT exams to demonstrate achievement of the math standard.
- The legislation also removes WASL scores on transcripts. These scores are not useful to colleges and so don't need to be shown.

Alternate pathway to graduation:

A third component, HB 2582, was approved by the House and allows students who have completed all state and local graduation requirements but have not yet passed the WASL by the end of high school to earn their diploma at a community college. This is an important pathway for students who are very far behind in school, and for those who have limited English proficiency. The Senate failed to act on this proposal. We will try to implement this next session.



Birth to higher education

We focused part of our efforts this session in areas where the outcome leads to a high return on our investment.

Early Learning:

We consolidated child care and preschool programs currently scattered among many state agencies into a single Department of Early Learning. The department will collaborate with the K-12 school system to ensure that early learning programs prepare students for success in the classroom. It will also work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Talaris Research Institute and other partners to help parents and young children benefit from early childhood education.

Mentoring:

We provided funding to allow 100 high schools and their associated middle schools to adopt Navigation 101, a highly successful student



guidance program that gives every student a mentor, and involves parents in students' course selection and career planning. Results show higher numbers of students enroll in physics, chemistry and pre-calculus when they understand how the courses fit into their career and life goals.

High demand fields:

We boosted high demand enrollments by nearly 500 slots in math and engineering fields. We also created two new programs: Opportunity Grants for lower-income students to receive training in high-demand fields and Running Start for the Trades, which allows students to enter pre-apprenticeship programs while still in high school.

Supplemental Budget

Washington's rebounding economy and strong housing sector produced a \$1.5 billion surplus this year. Overall, I am pleased with the fiscal restraint we exercised this session to limit most of the spending to priority items and with the substantial amount of the surplus reserved in savings accounts.

Saving for the future

The final supplemental budget delivered to the Governor sets aside \$941 million in the following reserve and savings accounts for costs we expect to incur next biennium.



- Student Achievement Fund - \$275 million to pay for class size reductions and other education costs.
- Health Services Account - \$143 million to cover rising health care costs.
- Pension Funding Stabilization Account - \$302 million to pay down pension liabilities.
- General Fund Ending Balance - \$221 million in reserves for unexpected emergencies and natural disasters.

Investing in education and health care

Much of the \$522 million in new spending is invested in our children and maintenance items this session.

- \$38 million for an additional 11,690 students enrolled in our public schools;
- \$34 million for a K-12 employee cost-of-living increase mandated by Initiative 732.
- \$32 million for learning assistance and math remediation to help students meet graduation requirements.
- \$15 million to add 6,500 enrollees to the Basic Health Plan, mostly low-income adults and sometimes their children, to reduce visits to more costly emergency rooms.
- \$11 million to add 5,500 children to the Children's Health Plan, an inexpensive decision that has hugely positive impacts on their educational outcomes and well being.
- \$18 million to eliminate the Medicaid Part D co-payments for low-income or the disabled.



Lower Business Taxes

The Legislature approved more than \$50 million in tax incentives to improve the business climate in the state and help create additional jobs. We also created a bipartisan commission to examine more than 400 tax preferences to determine if their continuation still serves the public interest.

- Broadened two aerospace tax incentives to include companies engaged in research, design and engineering of airplanes and reduced the B&O tax rate for aviation repair services.
- Extended the temporary B&O tax reduction to help the aluminum industry.
- Tax benefits for timber cutting and forest product manufacturing
- Moved the monthly due date for business excise taxes from the 20th to the 25th day and cut late payment penalties.
- Raised the small business personal-property tax exemption from \$3,000 to \$15,000.

Regional Transportation Plan

A regional transportation system that includes a strategic mix of roads and transit is needed to accommodate the thousands of new motorists and daily trips between home and work expected in the next decade. The 2005 gas tax drew upon the entire state to help fund several megaprojects in the central Puget Sound region. The next step will require three counties, King, Pierce and Snohomish, to raise the rest of the revenue needed to finish those critical projects.



The Eastside delegation amended the Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID) bill to make sure that funding will be adequate for the 520 bridge project. It was great to have bipartisan cooperation on standing up for our interests. This bill will enable us to finish work on the 520 floating bridge, Interstate 405 and the Viaduct. The final measure ensures the RTID:

- Finances and builds a complete 520 bridge replacement project that meets transportation needs within the entire corridor;
- Requires the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to address neighborhood impacts before they start construction; and
- Also requires WSDOT to complete all environmental and financial work before starting construction of the bridge or the Viaduct. This includes preparing a finance plan that identifies funding sources, cash flow, staging and construction phasing plans. Linking the 520 bridge and the Viaduct makes sure that the highly political design process for 520 won't be held up by other jurisdictions.

The Governor and the Legislature will receive a report on project finance and implementation plans by September 1, 2006. A vote on a RTID funding package will occur simultaneously with Sound Transit Phase 2 on the November 2007 ballot.

The biggest issue that needs to be resolved is the Viaduct – do we build a tunnel or a replacement structure? There are arguments on both sides. I am concerned that spending an extra billion dollars on the viaduct leaves other projects under funded. Seattle will have to find the money before they can move forward.

Bipartisan Breakthroughs

Tougher Penalties

We toughened already some of the strictest laws in the nation against sex offenders by requiring 25-year minimum sentences for serious sex offenses against children younger than 15, plus added electronic monitoring requirements.

To deal with repeat drunk drivers, we added a felony conviction which will guarantee significant prison time after several offenses over a 10-year period.



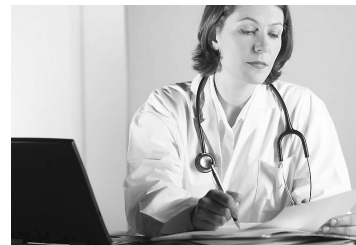
Unemployment Insurance



The Governor has signed SB 6885, a bipartisan agreement that will make long-term changes in the way in which unemployment insurance benefits are calculated. This was a historic and balanced compromise supported by both business and labor that will result in workers getting reasonable benefits and employers getting a system that is affordable and sustainable. I voted for the Boeing package in 2003, and this is a relatively minor adjustment to that.

Medical Malpractice

Following the defeat of two competing ballot measures last November, the Governor has signed HB 2292, a ground-breaking compromise that moves us in the right direction to save lives by reducing medical errors, lowering premiums for doctors, and reforming our civil liability system. Some positive changes include letting doctors apologize for bad outcomes and report bad behavior by their colleagues without fear of being sued in court. It also requires prescriptions be legible (hand-printed, typewritten or generated electronically) and penalizes frivolous lawsuits. This is a first step, but a useful one.

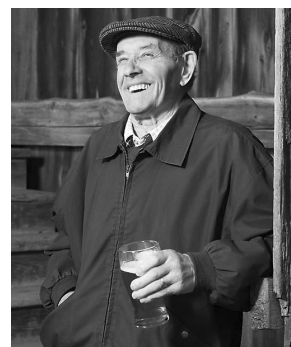


Water Use

Decades of gridlock came to an end with a breakthrough compromise agreement, HB 2860 which the Governor has signed, that will preserve the Columbia River for farmers, commerce, and fish. The plan will create holding facilities to store water that is not used in the winter, and make it available to both farmers and to fish.

Wine Distribution

The Legislature approved SB 6823, which will protect our small wine and beer producers in the state. A recent court decision ruled that we must subject Washington-made wines and beers to the same regulatory markups we impose on out-of-state producers. This bill satisfies the concerns of the courts by eliminating the required markup.



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Rep. Ross Hunter

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